

Hurricane Sandy: The Road to Recovery

Libraries and bookstores were devastated by the storm; here's what they're doing to cope.

BY KAREN SPRINGEN

On Monday, October 29, as Hurricane Sandy battered the East Coast, New Jersey's swollen Shrewsbury River sent two feet of water into the Oceanport Public Library. "We were left with books in the middle of the floor," says librarian Kate Hardy. "We lost the whole collection." Because of mold and sewage, even not-so-soggy titles had to go—which meant the library lost 18,000 items worth \$380,000. "At some level, the assumption is that all books, even if they're not wet, are contaminated," says Ken Sheinbaum, director of the 13-branch Monmouth County Library system, which includes Oceanport. "We don't want to give those books out to kids." In his 41 years with the Monmouth County libraries, he says, "this is the first time we've ever closed for more than a day for an act of God."

Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on libraries, schools, and bookstores throughout New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Connecticut, and it hurt business at many more. Bibliophiles and publishing professionals stepped in to aid in the ongoing relief efforts. Random House (distributing through First Book, a nonprofit that provides books to children from low-income families) and Scholastic (distributing through Kids in Distressed Situations, a New York-based nonprofit that helps in-need families) are each donating a million books to schools and libraries in the hardest-hit areas. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt committed to donate 70,000 books through First Book, and Simon & Schuster offered to send any damaged school or library 500 popular titles and multiple copies of 20 new releases. So far 28 schools and libraries, plus a handful of other organizations, have received the S&S titles. And Dollar General Literacy Foundation (with the American Library Association, the American Association of School Librarians, and the National Education Association) is giving disaster-relief grants to help public school libraries replace books and other supplies.

From Hurricane Katrina, relief groups learned "not to rush it," says Chandler Arnold, executive v-p of First Book. "There's a hierarchy of need—clean water and warm space and food. Then very quickly, some groups [realized], 'We do need stories for kids who are in temporary shelters.'" Libraries needed time to clean out mold and rebuild, he adds. "You don't want to restock books with dampness there."

To make sure mold and sewage water did not contaminate everything, four of the 62 Queens, N.Y., public libraries most severely hurt in the storm (three in the Rockaways and one in



Broad Channel, which reopened last month) shipped books to the Allentown, Pa., facility of Rapid Refile, where high-efficiency vacuums sucked away residual matter. (Volumes in worse condition went through a bacteria-killing gamma-radiation machine.) That saved 50,000 books. But these four libraries had to discard some 100,000 others that were too soggy or waterlogged, or paperbacks that would be cheaper to replace than to preserve. With more valuable books, it was worthwhile to spend \$1 to \$2 each to decontaminate what looked normal to "the untrained eye," says James Gilbert, v-p of Rapid Refile. "They're basically ready to go now, but the buildings aren't ready for them to come back. We have them in our climate-controlled storage."

One of the Rockaway libraries, the Arverne branch, filled with four-and-a-half feet of water and is currently operating out of a doublewide trailer, stuffed with about 2,000 books and 1,500 DVDs. The library lost about 80 percent of its collection, says Shakira Smalls, the jobs and youth counselor. At the Peninsula branch (operating out of a modular unit now), where surging water broke the glass entrance, "materials were actually floating out the door," says chief operating officer Bridget Quinn-Carey. "After the water receded, there literally were books on the street, on the plaza."

At the East Rockaway Public Library, even after the power returned, staff members couldn't turn on the heat because it would "speed up the process of mold growth," says library director Elizabeth Charvat. Two weeks after Hurricane Sandy, outside remediation experts covered shelves with plastic wrap to protect the books from mold. The library reopened February 2.

In the Yonkers, N.Y., public library's Riverfront branch, 300 books, which Disney-Hyperion donated when it moved from White Plains, N.Y., to Los Angeles, were awaiting cataloging when the storm hit, covering them with five feet of overflowing Hudson River water. The water also drenched 300 of the library's summer-reading titles and classics.

The still-closed Island Park Public Library, in Nassau County, N.Y., filled with three feet of seawater and some sewage water, ruining the bottom two shelves of its first-floor stacks—where many children's books were placed so kids could reach them. "We'll never know how many items we lost because we didn't have



Damage, repair, recovery (from l.): The main room of the Queens Public Library's Peninsula branch; an industrial vacuum at work at the Island Park Public Library; students at the OLC School in Jersey City with books donated by Scholastic.

time to count," says director Michelle Young, whose library remains closed. And because the storm was so unprecedented, she adds, "It's not like anyone can say, 'I know this kind of thing takes six months [to recover from].'" The \$500,000 insurance policy won't go far, according to Young, and the library has not yet received any FEMA reimbursement. It will, eventually,

because FEMA now considers libraries essential community organizations and pays for the replacement of library books and publications. In the meantime, although many people want to drop off used novels, the library can only accept new ones. "We don't want mold to come in," she explains. "It could hurt the whole collection. You put a bunch of moldy books in there, and you can cross contaminate the air."

Non-FEMA Zones

When it comes to getting FEMA money, not all libraries are created equal. Hurricane Sandy dumped more than eight inches of rain on Elyria, Ohio, shutting down the power in the main branch of the public library for more than 36 hours—which meant the sump pumps didn't work. As a result, four inches of water accumulated in the basement and the elevator shaft there filled with eight feet of water. The old floor tile loosened and curled, requiring more than \$10,000 worth of asbestos abatement. The total damage: \$100,000. Though the books were unscathed, the library—not in the official FEMA disaster zone—needed to reduce new acquisitions for 2013 by 12 percent to pay for the losses. "That is where we had to pull the money for disaster recovery," says library director Lyn Crouse. Simon & Schuster sent a mix of 500 children's, YA, and adult books. (Eleven of the Queens libraries also received shipments from S&S.) "Some of the stories that I've gotten about the books lost in the school libraries—many because they were checked out and in homes that were destroyed—just moved me to tears," says Michelle Fadlalla, director of education and library marketing for S&S. "We had a couple of public libraries say, 'We're not sure if you'll consider us eligible, but now any money we had for 2013 to purchase materials is going to replace damaged equipment.'"

School and Bookstore Losses

At schools, book losses hit classrooms and afterschool programs as well as libraries. Hurricane Sandy flooded the basement and seeped into the Sheetrock walls of Frank Hankinson Elementary (P.S. 50) in Staten Island, N.Y., destroying the area that housed the preschool program and the mini-library-on-wheels for an afterschool program. "Ten days after the storm, the room started to smell a little funky," says Sharon Fine, who retired in January

2013 as the principal. "We started to move furniture, and everything was green." Hankinson Elementary threw out more than 1,000 books, in addition to toys and furniture. But in January the students returned to a plethora of new books provided through Literacy Lifeboats, an initiative aimed at helping teachers and students in schools hard hit by Hurricane Sandy. It started with the Teachers College (Columbia University) Reading and Writing Project, a youth-literacy program.

The Project—"affiliated with a lot of literary giants," as its reading specialist Cheryl Tyler notes—reached out to authors such as Tomie dePaola, who gave "hundreds and hundreds of books." Other big-name donors include Jon Scieszka, Walter Dean Myers, and Jane Yolen. "We received donations from all over the world—Thailand, France, Sweden, Canada," Tyler says. "We had books in the hands of kids within three weeks."

The Our Learning Environment preschool in Island Park, N.Y., wound up under four-and-a-half feet of water and "lost everything," including more than 1,000 books, says Danielle Urrego, co-owner, director, and teacher. Simon & Schuster sent 500 new picture books. "It was like Christmas morning here," says Urrego. "We're barely making ends meet. This saved the day."

Booksellers suffered major losses as well. The tide came in so high that the Mystic River sent six inches of water into parts of Bank Square Books in Mystic, Conn. With the help of volunteers, co-owner Annie Philbrick moved somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 kids' books the day after the storm to an empty apartment upstairs from the shop, and temporarily packed 35,000 adult books into 400 crates and hauled them in two Mayflower moving vans to a storage facility two miles away. It took three weeks to dry out the walls and floors of the store and get it ready to reopen, with the help of books donated by Simon & Schuster, Penguin, Hachette, and Macmillan, among others. "People came in at Christmas and said, 'Thank God, you're back,'" says Philbrick. "We were grateful and appreciative of all the community support we received to help us get back up and running."

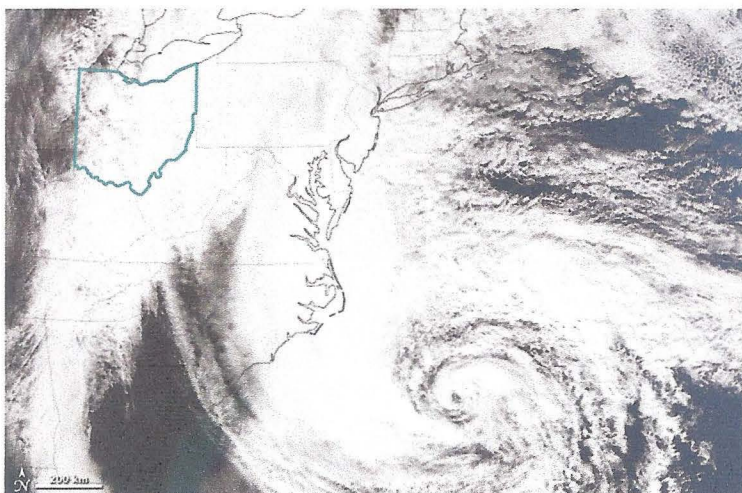
Like several other bookstores, River Road Books in Fair Haven, N.J.—four miles from the ocean and a block from a river—suffered from lost business more than from lost books. "It wasn't your top priority to go shopping," says co-owner Karen Ramage. S&S donated books to it and to six other bookstores hit by power outages and damage to the communities surrounding them.

But even with publishers, philanthropists, and book lovers giving generously, librarians are finding that some items are irreplaceable. Joan Walsh, director of the tiny Sea Bright Library in Monmouth County, N.J., notes that her collections included "a lot of treasures," such as old postcards and original diplomas from the local elementary school. The library hasn't reopened yet. Nor has the West End branch of the Long Beach, N.Y., library system, which incarded more than \$95,000 worth of books, films, and DVDs—in other words, everything—after it filled with three feet of water. "For the construction industry, there's a silver lining," says George Trepp, director of the Long Beach Public Library. But for book lovers? He pauses. "Not so much."

The Next Chapter

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HURRICANE SANDY CREATES DEVASTATING DAMAGE at the CENTRAL LIBRARY



The media coverage before, during and after Hurricane Sandy was unprecedented. The images of the storm-ravaged East coast were everywhere. But you may not have heard about the damage sustained by the Elyria Public Library System's Central Library.

A power outage that began at 10:00 pm October 29th and lasted until 10:30 am, Wednesday, November 1st, knocked out the sump pumps resulting in the entire basement flooding with several inches of water. All electrical systems of the elevator were destroyed making the elevator inoperable. The newly remodeled and carpeted Scheide Room was ruined. It was due to be dedicated November 4th; fortunately the one week old furniture was able to be saved. Loosening of floor tiles in the basement necessitated asbestos abatement.

The Technical Services Department (where all library materials are processed), the Public Relations Department and the staff room were uninhabitable. Information Technology was also flooded, flooring was lost, staff had to be relocated and computers and other equipment were damaged.

The cost of the immediate clean-up was \$39,000, but subsequently, floor tiles popped up requiring their removal before the re-flooring process could begin. Insurance coverage was some help, but coverage for ground water damage is limited in any policy.

The elevator shaft flooded when the elevator was on the ground floor, causing a leak of hydraulic fluid which had to be remediated. Originally it was thought to be a total loss as it was submerged, but it was able to be raised and drip-dried. We hope \$20,000 will cover the repair costs. The Central Library staff has no break room—many employees are eating lunches and taking breaks in their cars. There is no refrigerator to store lunches, no furniture to sit on and no flooring.

Steps were taken as soon as possible to keep the Central Library open for patrons. Technical Services and Public Relations have been temporarily moved to the West River Branch Library. Bids for restoration have been obtained from the necessary vendors.

The estimated amount (beyond insurance) needed to restore the entire basement is \$70,000.

This means we need the assistance of generous donors to help us restore our Central Library. The Elyria Public Library System will direct all gifts to the 2012 Sandy Restoration Appeal.

If you would like to help, please send donations to the Elyria Public Library Foundation, 320 Washington Ave., Elyria, Ohio 44035, Attention: Carol Campana, Treasurer. *The Elyria Public Library Foundation is a 501© (3) public charity. Your gift is tax deductible.*

Thank you!

the next chapter

Newsletter of the Elyria Public Library System Fall 2013



Before



After



TSD Before



TSD After



New Conference Room

Turning Lemons into Lemonade~

Dear Friends:

I am so pleased to be able to say thank you to our donors to the Hurricane Sandy Disaster Renovation Fund. A Grand Opening was held on July 26th to show off our post-disaster renovation to the basement at our Central Branch on Washington Avenue.

One of the hidden benefits of the flood turned out to be the opportunity to carve out a conference room and a public kitchen that, along with the renovated Scheide Room, make our library a great space to gather. In the past, library meeting room use was available only to 501(c)3 non-profit organizations, so most people never got any benefit from the library's public rooms. Beginning in September 2013, community members will be able to use those rooms at the Central Branch as well as two public meeting rooms, a conference room, and three tutoring rooms at the West River Branch.

These days, folks are often looking for public space for bridal and baby showers (no more cleaning your house!) Private tutors, consultants and sales people are looking for a safe, neutral place to conduct their business that affords more privacy than a table in an open area of the library. Vendors like to have a high traffic area in which to conduct a health fair or craft sale. Anyone interested in starting a duplicate bridge group? I played weekly at my former local library, and would love to do that again.

For businesses, our new high-tech Scheide Room meeting space at the Central Library, 320 Washington Avenue, is a great place to do staff trainings and presentations. It has Smartboards and wireless audio and Internet technology, along with training-style tables and chairs for 60+. Catering is permitted and there is a kitchenette for staging and clean up. The Miller Room, the large meeting room at our West River Branch, offers easy access from major highways and more available parking. All of our buildings are handicapped accessible, have public restrooms, and offer free parking.

We want to give the public access to these great meeting spaces, when they are not in use for library programming, so let's put them to work earning their keep. Currently our library is funded by approximately 50% state and 50% local dollars, but state funding keeps shrinking, and local voters are being increasingly burdened. The modest rental fees will allow us to utilize our space in a way that will supplement your tax dollars and enable us to become more self-sufficient. Check out the entire meeting room policy at www.elyrialibrary.org. I look forward to seeing you at the library.

Sincerely,

Lyn Crouse
Lyn Crouse, Director



Scheide Room



Back Hallway



Guests



New PR Office



New Kitchen



New IT Office

openhhouse

Friday, July 26, 2013

2:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Elyria Public Library System Central Branch
320 Washington Ave., Elyria, Ohio

This dry basement celebration is made possible by your generosity!

Won't you join us that afternoon for a special opportunity to see how we transformed the Hurricane Sandy storm damage to upgraded facilities to better serve our patrons.

ELYRIA PUBLIC
LIBRARY SYSTEM